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ISLE OF SKYE

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ISLE OF SKYE

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LET'S SEE THE ISLE OF SKYE

Skye is a remarkable island in very many ways; remarkable for its varied scenery, for its historic associations and for the attractive qualities of its people and their attitude towards life. Perhaps, however, its most outstanding quality is an indefinable sense in the atmosphere which seems to link not only the past with the present, but the present with all time, past and future.

There are three main ways of reaching Skye from the mainland. From Mallaig to Armadale, or to Portree by steamer; from Glenelg to Kylerhea by ferry; or across Kyle of Lochalsh to Kyleakin. Each crossing has a great interest of its own. As you approach Mallaig in the train from Fort William, you will, if the day be fine get distant views of the Cuillin Hills which are the heart of the island, and a powerful magnet drawing thousands to Skye each year.

There is something very striking about the view of the Cuillin from Arisaig, which the words of A. M. Harbord express well :-

"Think of cloud on Beinn-na-Caillich,
Jagged Cuillin soaring high,
Scent of peat and all the glamour
Of the misty Isle of Skye."

From Mallaig you can cross over to Armadale where you will be impressed by the rich woodlands, and there realise why Sleat has been named "The Garden of Skye." If you land at Sleat you can go to the Aird of Sleat with its fine view towards the south and south-west, and you can go over the hill from Kilbeg to Tarskavaig with its attractive bay and view towards Soay Island. You can continue on also and see the ruins of Dunscaith Castle, the ancient stronghold of the Macdonalds of Sleat.

OPPOSITE: LOCH CORUISK.

ARMADALE CASTLE

ARMADALE PIER LOOKING TO LOCH NEVIS

OVER THE SEA TO SKYE BY KYLE—KYLEAKIN FERRY.

OPPOSITE: KYLEAKIN FROM CASTLE MOIL

OPPOSITE: THE COOLIN AND BLAVEN FROM LOCH DHUGHAILL, SLEAT.

ABOVE: PEAT CUTTING NEAR FLODIGARRY.

BEINN NA CAILLICH FROM BROADFORD BAY.

LOOKING EAST FROM BROADFORD TOWARDS BREAKISH.

BLAVEN FROM TORRIN VILLAGE.

BEINN DEARG AND LOCH SLAPIN FROM THE ELGOL ROAD.

THE INACCESSIBLE PINNACLE, SGURR DEARG.

Armadale Castle has been for over 100 years the seat of the Macdonalds of Sleat. Hidden in the trees and invisible from the road, it is a castle clearly built in a time when clan warfare was a thing of the past.

You can, on the other hand, travel from Armadale in the steamer which takes you to Portree, via Kyle of Lochalsh. On this route you will pass the other two normal entrances to Skye; Kylerhea, which means the "strait of the tide race," where the tide runs fast through the narrows, and it is interesting to see how the ferrymen make allowance for it when taking you over; and Kyleakin (or the Kyle of Hako) probably the most popular route of all into Skye, since the ferry across the Kyle of Lochalsh can take passengers straight off the rail route from Inverness.

Skye, and the history of Skye, is to a great extent the history of the three main clans; Macleods, Macdonalds, and Mackinnons. The last were really vassals of the Lords of the Isles, and the Macdonalds took over a great deal of their territory. The traditional rivalry between the Macdonalds and the Macleods, which was the cause of many a bloody fight, traces of which exist all over the island, has left no rancour today between the clans.

Orde is also well worth a visit, and has a good view across to Strathaird. Next to Armadale is Ardavasar which is a Celtic name, the former name being Norse. That is one of the striking things throughout Skye; how the Norse and Celtic characteristics are everywhere to be found in the place names. The first Lord of the Isles, Somerled, was acclaimed clan chief after he had delivered the islanders from the Norsemen. The Norsemen left behind them not only place names but racial characteristics, in the tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed types. The native Celts tended to be dark, small and wiry. Racial characteristics are very mixed today, and the island type, although distinctly highland, may well be either Celt or Norse in characteristic, or a mixture of the two.

On the way to Broadford, Castle Knock is well worth a visit. This also belongs to the Macdonalds; and a mile further along you come to Lochnan Dubhrachan, a somewhat sinister-looking little loch with a reputation by tradition of harbouring a water-horse, or kelpie, the dread spirit of the Hebrides which is said to assume various guises, including that of humans, while its normal appearance is that of a horse.

Isleornsay is one of the loveliest little harbours that can be imagined, but one of rather tragic memories, for from here last century there sailed many men and women with their families who had been evicted from their cottages and small farms to make way for sheep. The Highland clearances were a brutal patch in history, and there was no excuse for the lack of humanity shown by those responsible. The clearances struck Highland life a blow from which it has not recovered today. Skye was especially hard hit; Today wherever you go, you can see places, once cultivated by thriving communities where now only remain the ruins of their cottages. There are now less than 10,000 people living on the island. These are by no means self-supporting, and the number is still on the decrease. One day perhaps we may see a change and life flow back where it is now diminishing. There are some districts where one feels the stream of life flowing strongly.

Such a place is Broadford; set in its wide bay with the heights of Beinn-na-Caillich behind, it presents

THE HUNGRY GULL ALIGHTS TO PICK UP SCRAPS LEFT BY CLIMBERS.

EAS MOR WATERFALL, GLEN BRITTLE.

with its trim houses, hotels, crofts, and shops, an impression of justifiable local pride.

A little way south of Broadford are the ruins of the farm, Corrie Chatachan, where Johnson and Boswell stayed over 120 years ago.

Elgol is easily reached from Broadford, via Torrin and Loch Slapin, from which Blaven rises. From Elgol is seen one of the most impressive views of the Cuillin range. Elgol is neither too far to allow a diminishing in grandeur, nor yet too near; so that it is possible to take in at a glance the whole range of the Black Cuillin from Gars-Bheinn to Sgurr-nan-Gillean.

If you proceed by road from Broadford, the variety of Skye is borne in on you. The road twists and turns sometimes on the edge of the sea, sometimes high up on a precipitous cliff position. To the right are beautiful islands, while to the left great hills rise up. You see first the Red Cuillin, crumpling but rounded lumps of red granite. They represent a great contrast to the sharp outlines of the Black.

NEXT PAGE : AN UNUSUAL ANGLE ON THE CIOCH, THE MECCA OF ROCK CLIMBERS.

THE SOAY BOATMAN.

Perhaps there will be cloud down on the hilltops. Skye is sometimes called Eilean-a-Cheo, or the island of mist. Sometimes the mist effects in the hills are very attractive. On the route north of Broadford you may get mist-shrouded views of the peaks in the Blaven group, or from Loch Ainort one of the Coire-nam-Bruadaran, leading up to Marsco. In this corrie there is a striking "V" waterfall which, in days of spate, shows very clearly from the road.

Among the cloud-sheltered corries and peaks it is possible to imagine all kind of mysteries. There is among all Highland hills, but especially among those of Skye, an ethereal beauty which is difficult to describe in words. Robert Louis Stevenson captures this spirit when he writes:-

" Where essential silence chills and blesses,
And forever in the hills recesses,
Her more lovely music broods and dies."

It is a pleasant road from Sligachan to Broadford with its views of islands, mountains and sea all the way.

Skye has many indentations and bays. The name "Skye" comes from the Gaelic "Sgiath," meaning a

PREVIOUS PAGE . A JANUARY VIEW OF BLAVEN FROM SGURR NAN GILLEAN

wing, presumably owing to its similarity in shape to the wing of a bird. At no time in the island can you be more than four miles from the sea. At the same time the island has a coast line of nearly 300 miles. You will not have to be long in Skye before you realise how this is possible.

On the Sligachan road you pass the Sconser Hotel and Sconser village. It was in the old inn at Sconsor that the Macdonald and the Macleod met in 1745 Prince Charlie's emissary, and decided not to join the venture. This was, therefore, a fateful meeting, the consequences of which it is difficult to measure. From Sconser you will get a good view of Raasay Island with its table mountain and Heights of Dun Caan.

On the other side of Loch Sligachan you will see some of the houses of Peinchorran village. There are there a series of villages leading to Portree. The Braes, Gedintallor, Ollach, Achnahannait. Inhabitants of these places became famous some sixty years ago for an incident known as the "Battle of the Braes." On this occasion the Inverness-shire police, aided by a contingent from Glasgow, were put to flight as they arrested three men whom the locals thought unjustly indicted. The whole dispute was occasioned by a difference of opinion between landlord and tenant over the grazing rights of the mountain, Ben Lee, the rather shapeless mass, which rises up behind the Braes. The matter was eventually satisfactorily settled.

Four miles beyond Sconser is Sligachan, and here we find one of the best known hotels in the island, and one whose service over a great number of years has lived up to its reputation. Sligachan is one of the meccas for climbers ; and the other main climbing base is Glenbrittle, but there are many excursions to be made from Sligachan, even if one is not a climber.

Camus Fhionnairidh (the bay of the white shieling) is worth a visit, via Glen Sligachan, but you should, above all, visit Loch Coruisk.

Loch Coruisk is such a unique loch it almost beggars description. After seeing it you feel you have had a glimpse of the inner secrets of the island. It cannot be called beautiful, but at the same time it is not ugly; rather is it awe-inspiring, weird, but magnificent. Its position is like a finger pointing to the heart of the Cuillin.

The Cuillin is the most wonderful range of mountains in the British Isles. There are various explanations given why they are called "Cuillin." Some think it is possibly derived from the Gaelic "a-chuillionn" which means holly; the assumption

STORM CLOUDS OVER GLAMAIG AND LOCH SLIGACHAN FROM PEINCHORRAN.

HARVESTING BY HAND IN TROTTERNISH.

HIGHLAND CATTLE BY THE SHORES OF LOCH AINORT.

A SKYE CROFTER'S HOME.

THE ROCK CLIMBERS' PARADISE.
SGURR ALASDAIR, SGURR SGUMAIN, SRON NA CICHE FROM COIRE LAGAN.

CANNA FROM GLEN BRITTLE BAY.

THE OLD MAN OF STORR.

THE COOLIN HILLS FROM ELGOL.

being that the jagged peaks are something like a holly leaf. It is also maintained that the hills are named after the warrior, Cuchullain. He, by legend, is related to have completed his training in Skye by walking across the island's bridge of cliffs; " as narrow as the hair of one's head, as slippery as the eel of the river, and as steep and high as the mast of a ship."

It is conceivable that this description might be a somewhat exaggerated one of a part of the main Cuillin ridge. The Cuillin are grand mountains for climbing winter or summer, despite their fierce appearance.

They are a good range for a hill walker to learn to become a climber. They are friendly when you know them, but it is best to get a proper introduction first by someone who does. The novice who learns first to rock climb in the Cuillin must realise too that he will not find in every range of mountains such firm, hard, safe, rock. Graham Dallas draws an apt picture of the Cuillin in the following poem :-

" Hills of my heart, you have charms for beguiling
All of God's world and his heavens above;
Stern to the stranger, bleak and unsmiling,
Bleak, but how dear to me—hills that I love."

From Glenbrittle there is in some ways more variety to be had from a rock-climbing point of view. For accommodation there is the excellent hotel, run by Mr. Macrae and his family, or there is the Norwegian-built youth hostel. Glenbrittle can be reached by road via Carbost, perched on the side of lovely Loch Harport, or you can walk up the Allt Dearg Mor Burn to the Mam and then down to Glenbrittle.

If you take the route you will pass through Coire-na-Creiche (the Corrie of the Foray) where the Macdonalds once carried on a running fight against the Macleods. The Allt Dearg, or Red Burn, is said to have derived its name from the blood which coloured it then. The fight ended up in Harta Corrie with the complete defeat of the Macleods, and the corpses of the slain were piled round an enormous boulder, ever since called the Bloody Stone.

From Sligachan there are two choices of road to Dunvegan ; via Drynoch, Struan, Colbost, Ose, Roskhill and Kilmuir. You can branch out at Drynoch for Carbost, Talisker, Portnalong, or Glenbrittle. The other road leads to Portree.

From Portnalong it is nor far to Talisker which is worth a visit even though the famous Talisker Distillery is not there but at Carbost. At Portnalong you get the impression of a lively community, where the people do a lot of spinning and weaving in their own homes. These activities are found to a certain degree in other places in the island, but nowhere do they flourish better than at Portnalong. Portnalong has a nice little harbour, capable of taking quite big ships.

IN GLEN SLIGACHAN LOOKING TO MARSCO.

LOCH SCAVAIG.

If you continue from Drynoch to Dunvegan on the Bracadale Road you will pass many places of interest and beauty. The climax of the view comes when you see the Macleod's Tables, those flat-topped hills which come into sight as you approach Dunvegan. It is said that the Macleod once gave James V a feast at the top of Healaval More by way of proving that he could produce a table finer than the King's. "These are my candlesticks," he is reported to have said, pointing to his clansmen who bore flaming torches. Dunvegan Castle, the oldest inhabited castle in the country, is the great attraction for visitors. It is indeed a wonderful place, ingrained with age, history, and traditions; full of many most interesting relics of long ago, and with more than a suspicion of the supernatural about it.

Here the old again meets the new, and the castle is today a well-furnished, modern dwellinghouse. For many centuries it has been the seat of the chief of the Macleods. The castle walls have rung with the echoes of the years, grim enough at times—as the famous bottle-neck dungeon testifies, but sometimes gay also, especially when the place resounded with the pipes of the MacCrimmons, the hereditary pipers of the Macleods. Boreraig, eight miles distant from Dunvegan was the MacCrimmons' school of piping. It was possibly thought to be far enough away so as not to disturb the Dunvegan household.

Glendale, seven miles from Dunvegan, gives an impression of a thriving community. When you see it, you cannot help wishing there were more places like it in Skye. Trim, prosperous crofts, well maintained: it conveys a sense of vigorous local life.

Space does not permit a full description of all the places you should visit from Dunvegan, but you should see the Fairy Bridge, and you should continue along the Vaternish peninsula to Lusta, Stein, Halistra, and Trumpan, or to Geary where you get a good view of the Askrib Islands in Loch Snizort, a fine locality for both fish and game.

Trumpan was the scene of a particularly vicious Macdonald-Macleod clash, when—in order to avenge a massacre which they had suffered at the hands of the Macleods, the Macdonalds landed in Ardmore Bay, and caught a good many Macleods worshipping at the Church in Trumpan. They set fire to the Church and burned alive every man, woman and child, except one woman who managed to get away and raise the Clan so that many Macleods quickly converged on Trumpan. The Macdonalds could not get away so quickly as their galleys had been left high and dry by the tide, and so they were overwhelmed and slain almost to a man. After the battle the Macleods did not bother to bury the dead, but simply heaped them up alongside a dyke, and built stones over them. This, however, spoiled the dyke, and with the next spring tide the sea came over it and ruined the field beyond; from whence this battle was always known as the " Battle of the Spoiled Dyke."

PORTREE HARBOUR

RHUM FROM ELGOL.

THE STORR ROCKS.

On the way to Skeabost from Dunvegan you pass through Edinbane with its views across Loch Greshornish and its rather sharp lefthand turning, and you pass through Borve, Arnisort, Breabost, Clachamish.

Skeabost is another area where trees abound. From a bridge over the Snizort River you can see a small island. On this island are the ruins of one of St. Columba's churches, and among the ruins is an ancient burial ground.

From Skeabost there is a good road to Portree with a hairpin branch to the left for Uig. On the way to Uig you pass Kingsbrough House, where Prince Charlie spent his first night in Skye. Uig has a fine bay and a good harbour in a picturesque setting. It was formerly an active fishing harbour, but this occupation has rather lapsed, although Uig gives an impression of a thriving community. There is an excellent hotel in Uig, and from there splendid expeditions can be made. A fine view will be found from the top of Beinn Edra on the backbone of the Trotternish peninsula.

North of Uig is Kilbride Point, the point where Prince Charlie first landed in Skye.

DUNVEGAN CASTLE.

SLIGACHAN BURN AND SGURR NAN GILLEAN.

MORNING LIGHT OVER THE HARBOUR, PORTREE.

PORTREE FROM THE PIER.

THE COOLIN HILLS FROM TARSKAVAIG.

About five miles north of this is Duntulm Castle It is a gaunt, grim place, a relic of a barbaric age. This was once the seat of the Macdonalds of the Isles and fell to ruin a little over 100 years ago; and many a dark tale is told of the doings there. There is, for example, the story of the Macdonald who invited a Macleod to the castle on the excuse of making up their enmities, and fed him on salted fish before he started back. This made him thirsty, and he stopped to drink from a burn on the way. As he knelt to drink, a henchman, who Macdonald had sent to accompany him out of courtesy, took the opportunity to cut off his head. All this had been planned in Duntulm previously, and the castle was presumably then decorated with his head.

Just south of Duntulm Castle is Flora Macdonald's monument, to whose courage and devotion Samuel Johnson paid striking tribute.

Flodigarry Hotel should be visited, perched high as it is above the sea, with its very fine view of Staffin Bay. Staffin is another community showing signs of strength and life, and the land looks here in most part in good heart and well cultivated.

North-west of Staffin is the Quirang, a strangely-shaped collection of rocks, among which tradition has it that the locals in ancient times used to hide their sheep and cattle when they saw bearing down upon the shores the galleys of the Norse raiders.

The road from Staffin to Portree is like the curate's egg; good only in parts; but it gives very fine views across the Minch and the Sound of Raasay. For most of the way it travels along the top of steep cliffs. You should stop as the top of the Mealt Waterfall and have a look at it and at the Kilt Rock.

The Storr Rocks are another weird and fantastic collection of rocks and pinnacles on the road to Portree. The Storr Lochs are going to provide power for a big hydro-electric scheme, and the powerhouse will be located on the edge of Bearreraig Bay. We may hope this hydro-electric power will make a big contribution towards bringing back the glow of life to Highland districts.

Portree is really best seen from the sea. From this aspect it looks attractive and snugly fitted in to the surrounding hills. It is a neat little town of great historic associations. It is a nice harbour in a beautiful setting, and a good shopping centre. It is called Portree after the landing there of King James V (righ being the Gaelic for king).

There are many excursions of interest in Portree and its surroundings. There is, for instance, MacCoiter's cave, once used by smugglers, and reported by tradition to go right through the island to Loch Bracadale. Further along the coast is Prince Charlie's Cave where he hid for some days before going across to Raasay.

OPPOSITE : PORTREE AND THE OLD MAN OF STORR FROM PEINA FILER.

ABOVE : BEINN TIANNAVEG FROM ACHANNAIT NEAR THE BRAES

SKYE FROM KYLE OF LOCHALSH.

DUNTULM CASTLE.

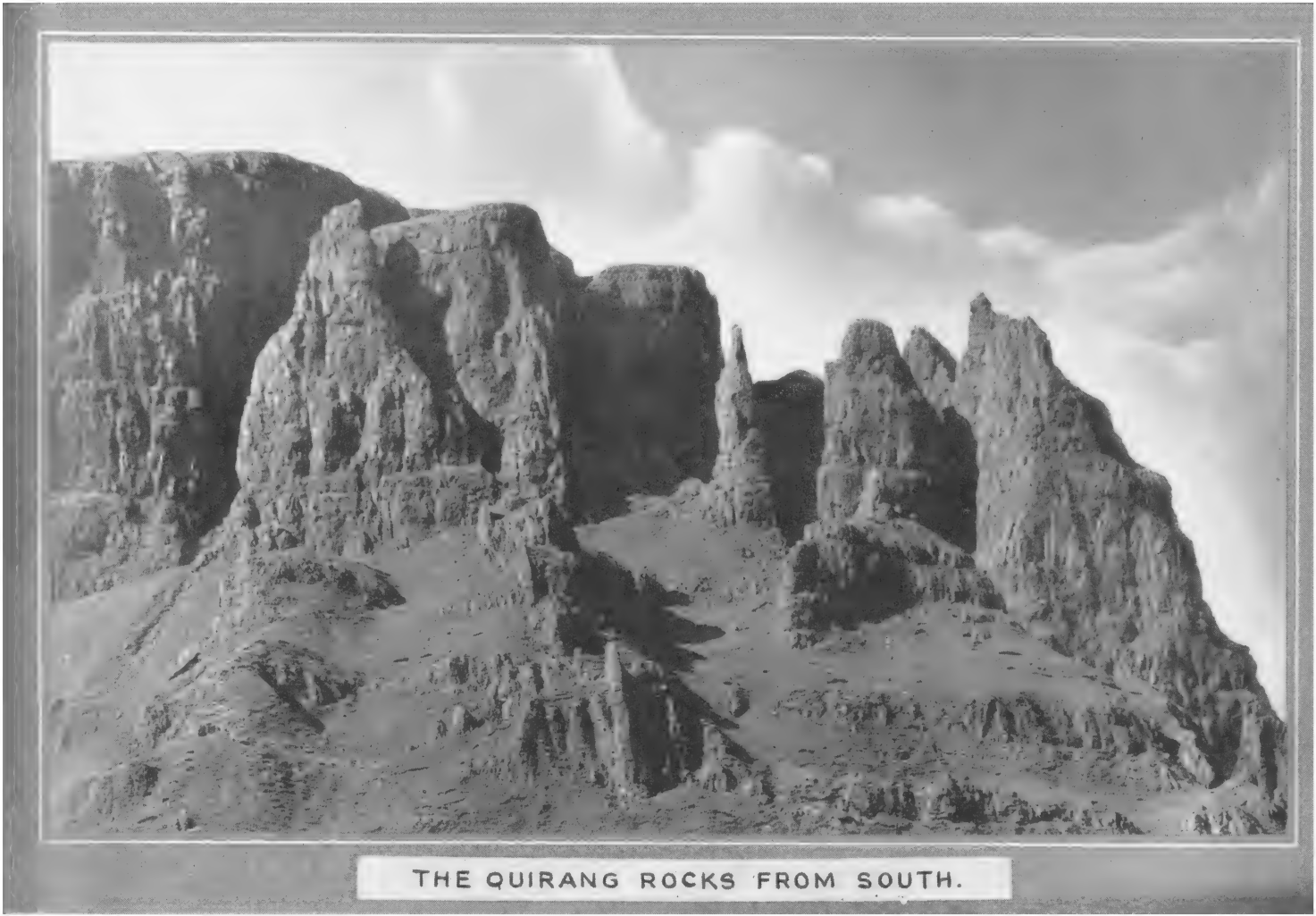
THE OLD MAN OF STORR FROM LOCH FADA.

THE QUIRANG ROCKS FROM STENCHOLL, STAFFIN.

OPPOSITE: SLIOCH AND THE TORRIDON HILLS,
34 MILES AWAY, FROM ABOVE STAFFIN.

ABOVE: FLODIGARRY HOUSE
AND HOTEL.

THE NEEDLE ROCK, QUIRANG.



THE QUIRANG ROCKS FROM SOUTH.

FLORA MACDONALD'S MONUMENT,
KILMUIR CHURCHYARD

Beinn Tianavaig is one of the best viewpoints on the island, and again the Cuillin views from here are magnificent on a good day.

You may sail away from Skye on the 8 a.m. steamer from Portree, or you may proceed back to Kyleakin, but I have no doubt that you will go across to the mainland with many a backward glance and a sadness to be leaving, No doubt, you will resolve to return. Once Skye has reached your heart, you will always want to return again and again, and unimaginative and dull indeed is the heart which Skye cannot touch.

Skye is full of wonder at all seasons. It is an island of contrasts, and of all kinds and moods of weather. Sometimes it can be like Paradise, and this is true either winter or summer. I remember one February night not long ago, when standing in the vicinity of Sligachan, the outline of the hills, on which snow was lying, showed clearly against the sky. The view was lit by stars and a moon nearly full. It was like standing in an amphitheatre of silver, sparkling hills ; and all across the northern sky the aurora borealis (merry dancers) flickered and glowed. I could not imagine a fairyland more beautiful than was Skye on that night.

On this note we must bid for the time being, "au revoir" to "The Winged Isle."

OPPOSITE: STAFFIN BAY AND VILLAGE.

UIG FROM THE SOUTH.

ANOTHER VIEW OF UIG

A TYPICAL SKYE VILLAGE, EDINBANE.

SKEABOST HOUSE.

THE FAIRY BRIDGE.

A SKYE CROFT.

THE DRAWING ROOM, DUNVEGAN CASTLE, WITH THE FAIRY FLAG ON THE WALL ABOVE THE FIREPLACE

A SNUG LITTLE CROFT NEAR PORTREE.

LOOKING ACROSS LOCH BRACADALE TO MACLEOD'S TABLES.

THE COOLIN HILLS FROM OSE.

NEXT PAGE; DAY'S WORK FINISHED
PORTREE.

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